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Why I Write

Abstract

The question 'why do I write?' bewilders me somewhat. I know (or can make a reasonably good guess) why I do not do certain things: drive a car, for example, or cook wonderful meals every day. Perhaps disabilities lend themselves more easily to explanation. You have to constantly justify, to yourself and others, why you cannot do these things which make life so much more pleasant.



Githa Hariharan was educated in Bombay, Manila, and in the United States. She has published several short stories in magazines and journals, and edited *A Southern Harvest*, a collection of stories translated into English from four south Indian languages.

Githa Hariharan's first novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, was published by Penguin India in 1992, and won the Commonwealth Writer's Prize in 1993 as the best first novel. She has since published a collection of short stories, *The Art of Dying* (Penguin, India). 'The Remains of the Feast' is from that collection. Githa Hariharan lives in New Delhi with her husband and two sons, Rishab and Nishad.

GITHA HARIHARAN

Why I Write

The question 'why do I write?' bewilders me somewhat. I know (or can make a reasonably good guess) why I do not do certain things: drive a car, for example, or cook wonderful meals every day. Perhaps disabilities lend themselves more easily to explanation. You have to constantly justify, to yourself and others, why you cannot do these things which make life so much more pleasant.

The point I am making, in rather circuitous fashion, is that I can talk about motives for writing (mine or anyone else's) with far less confidence than I can about an assortment of skills that are recognised as survival-helpers.

To avoid escaping the question altogether, I can offer a combination of possibilities. First I cannot imagine my life without either talking or reading; without the constant intrusion of, and involvement with, words. Some words, some combination of words seem to demand that they are put down on paper. Then, I have opinions, ideas and theories – a good deal of which may never get the chance to be aired if I do not write. And finally, like the woman in the Indian folk tale who gets fatter and fatter because she does not tell the stories swelling up her insides, I need to communicate the designs and patterns I constantly see – stories – if I am to move further, carry on with the business of living. The woman in the folk story finally learns to tell her story to the walls. I feel some kinship with her; perhaps I too write to remain, at least metaphorically, slim and healthy.